Interstellar (adjective): situated or occurring between the stars; conducted, or existing between two or more stars

Star Educational Society recognizes International Day of the Girl

with a speech by 16-year-old Starian, Zahra Habibi

Honoring my mother
My mother was widowed by the age of twenty-one with three children below five years old and one in her belly. They buried my father and left her alone. After a while she had many proposals, but she never said "yes" to any of them, instead she showered her children with all her love. She was totally aware of what she was doing. She felt a duty for all her children and I didn't expect them to appreciate us. She never believed us. It was a normal reaction. All of us tried to convince them, but they didn't believe us. It was a normal reaction and I didn't expect them to appreciate us or believe us, but what really hurts me is that it's not only the idea of two or three men, most men in Afghanistan think that a girl doesn't have the ability to do something difficult and challenging. Because of these wrong beliefs, they prevent women from improving.

Egyptian is a male-dominated society and, if a girl wants to do something, she must have the support of a man and many men decide that their female family members should be kept locked at home and not allowed to do things they want. It's not only that. Many other dangerous things happen in Afghanistan and girls are suffering from them – like raping, kidnapping, killing and street harassment. Even in safe places girls like a dormitory, girls don't feel safe. Fortunately, many girls are not accepting injustice anymore. They fight for their rights with knowledge, sports, being active members of society and many other things which show their ability and strength.

The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams. – Eleanor Roosevelt

Donors pledge billions to Afghanistan but seek...
Honoring my mother

My mother was widowed by the age of twenty-one with three children below five years old and one in her belly. They buried my father and left her alone. After a while she had many proposals, but she never said “yes” to any of them, instead she showered her children with all her love. She was totally aware of what she was doing. She felt a duty for us and chose to take care of four very small children all on her own.

My mother succeeded to train my siblings and I better than any man. However, she never enjoyed life. Before she passed away, my sister was married. My brother and I were university students reaching the university level, an accomplishment that many of her own relatives could not do.

As a woman who could not read and write, my mother did much more than anyone could have expected. Nobody ever thought it was a common illness she was sick as she had been working until one week before she passed away. Everyone thought it was a common illness that she thought her mother was crazy. The mean streets of the night were covered with snow and ice. I was like a corpse in the darkness. I cursed aloud in my mind. But then it was gone. I looked at my long, colorful skirt and noticed she was very ill. She asked for the doctor to come and told us the bad news. One night her health worsened, but she did not disturb the sweet sleep of her children. She waited until morning. Before sunrise my oldest brother woke up and noticed she was very ill. She asked for water and some bread. I ran to get a doctor, but she did not recover. We brought her to the hospital, but after a short time the doctor came and told us the bad news that she had passed away. This was the moment everyone came to know how truly sick she had been.

A close friend of mine said, “Maybe her duty was finished - Resalatesh be Payan Resal.” It was true, she had fulfilled her duty beyond everybody’s expectations, but it was not the time for her to go! It was time for my mother to enjoy the rewards of her labor and sacrifices. It was time for her to reap the harvest of what she nurtured and raised. But the bitter truth was this…she was gone. Although my mother will never come back, her strong spirit will survive in me and my siblings and every success that we enjoy will always be a reflection of the beautiful, selfless woman that was our mother.

My mother succeeded to raise four children without a man being there. Everyone could only see the results of her hard work, not her endless struggles and sacrifices, working day and night for a bit more income. Even my siblings and I could not understand her sacrifices, because she protected us from the truth of her struggles.

My mother was a member of the cleaning staff in a governmental organization. At nights, she did tailoring for the neighbors and acquaintances. On weekends she did the laundry for one of the government officials from her daytime job. In spite of all these jobs and endless hours of work, she never had enough money at the end of the month. She never bought herself a new dress, whereas she always made sure that we were well-dressed. With all of her work and responsibilities, she usually arrived home late. The mean streets of the night wanted to swallow her in their darkness, but nothing in this world could frighten my mother except thoughts of a dark future for her four children.

My mother was the strongest woman who ever existed. Nobody ever understood how much she suffered raising four children without a man beside her. Everyone could only see the truth of her struggles. Working day and night for a bit more income, even my siblings and I could not understand her sacrifices, because she protected us from the truth of her struggles.

My mother was a star alumna. She was a student of teacher training and creative writing classes and will major in BBA when she starts her university studies in near future.
Preventing a Disease Is Better and Easier Than Its Treatment

Reported by: Mohammad Mansir Kamran is a Teacher at Star Educational Society, C Branch. He is currently studying curative medicine at Kabul Medical University (third year).

Almost everyone knows that nowadays majority of the patients leave our country and go abroad e.g. Pakistan and India for a better treatment, which indicates we have a lot of serious health problems here in Afghanistan. Many factors come together and cause critical health situation in our society. In addition to irresponsible government, low quality of education in medical institutes and illiteracy of the people, preferring curative medicine to preventive medicine, due to its high income, is a basic and important factor which causes health problems. Unlike Afghanistan, in developed countries the responsible authorities prioritize preventing the diseases not treating them. Now the first and the most important step to overcome or at least decrease health problems in our society is that we should focus more on prevention of the diseases. First the polluted environment, which is a good medium for the development of microorganisms that later cause diseases. For instance, we can hardly get diseased. Conversely, exercise is a good way of being healthy.

In brief, we have got a lot of health problems in our country and therefore most of the diseases are not treatable in this country. But a better solution is that we should focus more on prevention rather than treatment. The government should pay more attention to health problems and must enhance the quality of education in medical fields, especially public health faculties. In addition to eliminating pollution, vaccination, good nutrition and exercise there are many other preventive activities which we can do to prevent diseases. For instance, we should try not to be in contact with patients especially patients suffering infectious diseases; because they can easily transfer from one person to another. We should keep our body, clothes and environment clean. And finally it is better to have a regular checkup of the whole body at least twice or thrice a year.
Donors pledge billions to Afghanistan but seek push for peace

By Pamela Constable and Michael Birnbbaum
Republished from Washington Post

KABUL — Western governments and other donors prepared to pledge more than $15 billion in aid to Afghanistan at a conference in Brussels on Wednesday, saying the struggling, insurgency-plagued nation deserves more economic support but stressing that its leaders must focus on ending the 15-year war with Taliban insurgents.

“The Taliban and their allies cannot wait us out,” Secretary of State John F. Kerry told the delegates, adding that the war with the insurgents cannot be won on the battlefield. “We will not abandon our Afghan friends,” he declared.

Kerry pointed to a recent peace deal between Afghan officials and fugitive militant leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, calling it a path to an “honorable” peace.

“Without our vigilance and support, Afghanistan could easily slide backward” as it grapples with violent extremism, political factionalism and poverty, he said.

But Tusk added that while foreign financial aid is welcome, “far more important is to support the efforts of those pushing for peace.”

In Afghanistan on Wednesday, the Taliban kept up a third consecutive day of attacks on targets across the country, reinforcing its defiance of both the Hekmatyar peace deal and the donor conference, which it has denounced as a gathering of “occupiers.”

Insurgent forces continued to advance in southern Helmand province, where they took over the capital of Khan- shin District on Tuesday and battled Afghan forces near the provincial capital, Lashkar Gah.

After a two-day battle in the northern city of Kunduz, Taliban forces mostly withdrew but set buildings on fire. They also cut off roads in western Farah province, and fought armed residents as they tried to enter the capital of eastern Baghlan province.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, in a lengthy speech at the conference, spoke of his government’s commitments to ending poverty, empowering women, becoming economically self-reliant and enabling an educated new generation to “bring us prosperity and stability.”

Citing the Taliban attack on Kunduz, he said: “We had predicted a series of attacks designed to overshadow the Brussels conference, but this gathering of leaders… cannot and will not be overshadowed. Enemies of freedom can affect the news cycle, but they will not dent our will.”

Ghani also spoke of the peace deal with Hekmatyar, saying it had been negotiated in Kabul and based on the Afghan constitution. “Afghans can make peace. We will make peace,” he said.

The supportive purpose of the Brussels meeting was somewhat undercut by two controversies on the sidelines: a protest outside the conference by hundreds of activists from Afghanistan’s ethnic Hazara minority and complaints about a new agreement between the Kabul government and the European Union in which Ghani agreed to accept the return of all Afghan asylum seekers who do not qualify for protection.

The protesters, representing the “Lightening” movement founded in Kabul last year, demanded electrification for several rural provinces where the bulk of Hazaras live, as well as an end to what they see as discrimination against Hazaras.

Negotiations with the Kabul government over the electrification issue have failed, and the U.N. mission in Kabul has been trying to mediate. In July, terrorists bombed a peaceful protest by the group in Kabul, killing 85.

“Afghanistan is not a safe home country,” read one sign held up by a protester.

The agreement on asylum seekers, which was signed by Ghani and EU officials several days ago, surprised many Afghans and raised concerns by human rights groups about the fate of hundreds of thousands of Afghans who have fled to Europe in the past two years, driven by insecurity and lack of jobs. More than 178,000 applied for asylum in the European Union last year.

Under the agreement, which critics suggested was a quid pro quo for promises of new European aid, all Afghans who reach Europe and do not qualify for refugee status will be asked to leave voluntarily. If they do not, the document says, “they will be returned to Afghanistan.” It outlines a detailed plan for sending them back by plane and even suggests setting up a receiving terminal at Kabul airport.

Deporting such people is a top priority for EU leaders, who face public backlash against the more than 1 million migrants who entered Europe last year. The agreement does not limit the total number that can be deported to Afghanistan, except for a maximum of 50 per plane in the next six months. But one leaked document this year suggested EU countries want to deport up to 80,000 Afghans.

“I source said the Afghan government for its courage in agreeing on a way forward to manage migration fairly,” Tusk said at the conference. He said the E.U. will support the returns with money and job-creation programs.

Demonstrators from Afghanistan’s Hazara minority rally for the community’s rights, outside the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, Oct. 5, 2016. REUTERS/Francisco Lenoir (Francisco Lenilor/Reuters)
Europe Makes Deal to Send Afghans Home, Where War Awaits Them

By ROD NORDLAND and MUIJ.B MASHAL
Reproduced from The New York Times

October 15th, 2016

Afghan refugees at the detention center on Lesvos last year. European officials are de- crying that continued aid to Afghanistan is tied to the deportations of refugees, as some Afghan officials and nongovernmental agency workers have said. Credit Sergey Ponomarev for The New York Times

Refugees, mostly from Syria and Afghanistan, walking through Budapest, Hungary, last year. Credit Mauricio Lima for The New York Times

BRUSSELS — The European Union and Afghanistan announced a deal on Wednesday that would send tens of thousands of Afghan migrants who had reached Europe back home to an increasingly hazardous war zone.

The agreement is the most specific effort yet by Europe to divert or reverse a wave of hundreds of thousands of migrants from war-torn countries including Afghanistan and Syria. But unlike a major agreement with Turkey this year to have that country host more Syrian refugees, the new deal would forcibly send Afghans whose asylum applications were rejected directly back to an intensifying war that has taken a severe toll on civilian life — seemingly at odds with international conventions on refugees.

“The E.U. and the government of Afghanistan intend to cooperate closely in order to organize the dignified, safe and orderly return of Afghan nationals to Afghanistan who do not fulfill the conditions to stay in the E.U.,” the agreement read.

The repatriation deal was announced alongside an international conference in which governments pledged $3.75 billion in annual development aid to Afghanistan over the next four years. But few of the keynote speakers even hinted at the worsening security in the country in recent weeks, and none publicly discussed the repatriation deal, which was reportedly signed on Sunday.

Taliban fighters on Wednesday attacked Afghan security forces who were fighting for a third day to maintain control of the main government buildings in Kunduz, a vital provincial capital that briefly fell to insurgents last year. In the Afghan south, another of the few remain- briefly fell to insurgents last year. In the province of Kunduz, a vital provincial capital that has been in a state of siege for more than a month, the Taliban has been able to make gains in Uruzgan, Helmand, Uruzgan, and even Kabul with the help of the USA and the Afghan forces. Against that backdrop, the new repatriation deal with Europe instantly rankled Afghan officials and international aid workers, some of whom said that by any measure of stability, Afghanistan was a hazardous place.

“Return conditions are on every indicator deteriorating: People are fleeing extremely badly, there are huge spikes in evictions, displacement, and the E.U. is striking deals to return asylum seekers,” Mr. Tyler said.

In addition to the fact that even Afghan districts and major highways once declared safe are now threatened or overrun by the Taliban, the returns from Europe will go back to a dire economic crisis, with an unemployment rate of about 35 percent and about 400,000 young people entering the job market every year.

“Their logic is that provincial capitals are safe. But the reality — look at Kunduz, Helmand, Urzgan, and even Kabul with the recent US and Afghan forces’ bombings — clearly indicates they are not safe,” Mr. Sharan said.

With nearly 10,000 troops in Kunduz, the government is not able to secure a provincial capital.”

In Kunduz on Wednesday, residents fled in increasingly large numbers despite Taliban roadblocks on the main roads out. More than 1,000 families arrived in neighboring Takhar Province, its governor said.

Shops in Kunduz remained closed, and the city was without electricity and running water for a third day.

Marzia Salam Yafatal, the head doc- tor at Kunduz’s central hospital, said the Taliban’s roadblocks left many unable to bring in their wounded. Even the hospital where she works did not remain safe: Several staff members told the Associated Press they were in peril in the afternoon, forcing the workers to move to patients to the basement. The Taliban is able to capture the city in a single day, but government with all its power is not able to reach Kunduz in three days,” said Sayid Assudallah Sadat, a member of the Kunduz provincial council. “The fighting is house to house.”

Correction: October 6, 2016

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The Sahar Speaks program was created by Amie Ferris-Rotman who worked in Kabul for two years as a senior correspondent for Reuters, an international news agency. During her time in Kabul, she noticed that there were no female Afghan journalists working for the foreign news outlets that were reporting from Afghanistan. She created Sahar Speaks to support women in finding jobs with news outlets like BBC, the New York Times, AP, AFP and so on.

I remembered how unsure I was when I first applied for the program. At first glance, I thought it would be a really great opportunity for me so that I could further my dreams of becoming an efficient female journalist in Afghanistan. Fortunately, not too long after I applied, I received an email saying that I was accepted. I was very happy and excited.

The first day was a cold and rainy morning. I was really excited for the program so I left my house a little earlier than usual. I arrived at around 8 o’clock and met Ms. Amie Ferris Rotman, the organizer of the Sahar Speaks program. She smiled at me and welcomed me by giving me a warm hug. I was surprised that she recognized me because we had never met in person but had exchanged a few emails in the past.

People started shuffling in one by one. It was clear that each and every one of us were happy and excited to be there. The group consisted of twelve young women who held jobs ranging from journalists to freelance photographers to filmmakers. In Afghanistan, female journalists face many challenges. Our biggest concerns are for our safety and the safety of our families. For example, women cannot report from the most critical and challenging places because a majority of women have responsibilities in the home. Even if they can manage to do both, most of their families do not approve of them becoming journalists or photographers. Most young women in Afghanistan are told, “Girls are not to become journalists or photographers,” as if it is a shame.

There are dozens of other traditional issues that cause the withdrawal of women journalists. In Kabul, many women pursuing journalism as a career face sexual harassment and shaming when trying to conduct interviews.

One of the speakers in our program was Sahar Lewal, a female Afghan journalist on Radio Azadi. I truly felt like I had a personal connection with Sahar because she was one of the few female journalists that had a difficult time becoming as successful as she is. She told us her inspiring story and all the stereotypes and hardships she had to overcome with her family and community in order to become a successful journalist. She also described the difficulties she faced in her journey, for example, she often went home late because she needed to finish work at the office or people didn’t treat her with respect.

Lisa Essex is a British journalist and trainer and a former employee at Reuters, the international news agency, and was one of the speakers on our first day. Essex explained that on her way to the program that morning, she actually had an accident with someone riding a bicycle. Although she was hurt, she stayed strong and encouraged us to be brave in every situation. She really inspired me by staying strong and continuing to be energetic and positive despite being hurt.

Unfortunately, she needed to leave the country before planned for medical treatment. May Jeong, an award-winning freelance writer based in Kabul is one of the best pitch writers. She made an appearance at the program. A pitch is a writer’s description of a potential story. She taught us that a strong pitch was the first step to writing a good story. By writing a strong pitch, foreign outlets would be less likely to reject our stories. Mr. Joel van boxtel, an independent photojournalist, not only did he take beautiful and amazing pictures of the program and the participants, he also conducted the training session on photography.

We learned many things during the program. We learned how to introduce ourselves, manage our time, and collect materials to report on. This was an especially valuable experience for every journalist because it is important to stay professional. We focused on writing leads, headlines, golden quotes and courses, the essentials of being an accomplished journalist. When the training was successfully completed, the guest speakers became our mentors and helped us with writing and getting our stories out to the Huffington Post. None of us were expecting to make such a wonderful team with such strong communication skills. and as time went on, our team became stronger and closer.

Danielle Moylan, an Australian journalist in Afghanistan, became my mentor and helped me with my story immensely by showing me ways to improve my writing. I decided to write about strong business women, women who were the breadwinners of their families, women who started small businesses to help support their families. With my story, “Female breadwinners in Afghanistan, from dried fruit-makers to businesswomen,” I was trying to show the world that Afghan women can succeed in the face of gender discrimination, insecurity and a dominant patriarchal society.

Because there is freedom of expression, to some extent, and support for women journalists such as the Sahar Speaks program, women reporters can move forward and be successful in this area. I know that I am a lucky girl, I know that I will always have the support of my family, especially my father. He has been my biggest supporter since the day I decided to start studying journalism. However, I recognize that others are not as fortunate as I am. My friends who dream of pursuing a career in journalism never have enough support or confidence to continue. As a female journalist, myself, I always advise them to be brave and courageous and to not be afraid of anything. Afghan women are the ones at the forefront of creating a better, unified Afghanistan. Like Afghan businesswomen, we can do our best to not be treated as victims anymore. We will progress, move forward and create equality for all.
My Grandmother Told Me

One day mullah Salihī disappeared. He had left the country and had gone to Iran. A few weeks later up to four young girls from the village had become pregnant.

Perhaps my memory betrays me but for the better part of my life we did not have a mosque in the village, or a full time mullah. These things came to us when the troubles began. The villagers used the house with the largest room and corridor as the place for sermons and prayers during Moharram. I remember them visiting my father’s place in the balna-aaghil. The women gathered in the corridor, and men gathered in the sun-room to say their prayers and listen to the sermons delivered by a Sayed, or the elders in the village. Men beat their chests, the women stayed and listened, and then we all returned home, back to our lives and livelihoods. All the leaders and prayer leaders in the villages had their own families to look after, farms to care for, cattle to herd and the same problems the rest of us had. They did not sit above the rest of us.

That generation died. The order changed. People went to madrassas in Ootqol, Kabul and Iran. They returned as mullahs with special books, looks and garments. They went from village to village, and preached, and did little else. Along with them came a mosque and more. The mullahs and elders forcefully acquired the land where the village mosque stands today. That is the reason why it is such a cursed place, and nothing good ever comes out of it.

In the later years the villagers paid a person named Salihī to become the mullah for the village. He had attended madrasas in Iran and read all the prayers and magic. The villagers paid him, fed him, and gave him a share of their income every year. The sent their young children to the mosque to this mullah so that they could learn their religious obligations, rituals and prayers.

One day Salihī disappeared. The villagers could not find him. He was not in the village, and they could not find him in Sang-e-Masha or Jaghori. He was not in the country but had gone to Iran. A few weeks later up to four young girls from the village, the girls who studied before him at the mosque had become pregnant. Salihī had lured them into his room at the mosque under the pretence of teaching them the Islamic way to bathe, and raped them. Not one girl, not two, four girls. The babies were aborted, the lives of the girls and the honour of their families was ruined, and the mullah fled to safety in Iran.

Many years later when the country was quieter, I heard that Salihi had returned to watan and become the secretary to the district governor and commander. It is as if nothing had even happened. That devil might still be there, he may still be working for the governor, and he may still be abusing children.

Mullah = Islamic clergy
Moharram = The first month of the Islamic calendar, observed as a month mourning in Shia Islam
Madrassa = Islamic school
Balna-Aaghil = Upper Village
Watan = Homeland

The Sail

Gleams white a solitary sail
In the haze of the light blue sea.—
What seeks it in countries far away?
What in its native land did leave?

The mast creaks and presses,
The wind whistles, the waves are playing;
Alas! It does not seek happiness,
Nor from happiness is fleeing!

Beneath, the azure current flows,
Above, the golden sunlight streaks:—
But restless, into the storm it goes,
As if in storms there is peace!

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov (1814-1841) was a Russian Romantic writer, poet and painter, sometimes called “the poet of the Caucasus”, the most important Russian poet after Alexander Pushkin’s death in 1837, and the greatest figure in Russian Romanticism.
Dear Massoud Malik, tell us about your self and share with us an influential experience that led you to become a TV journalist. I, Massoud Malik, am an original resident of Andarab district of Baghlan province. I got my bachelor degree in geo-engineering from Kabul University. I broke my acceptance to the university, my situation was very difficult. I started lessons in my favorite field. Also I left my province behind, the place which shaped my childhood dreams, the school where its walls and doors beside my classmates and teachers taught me so many things. Love and friendship, the family whose care and support is and was with me all the time, and the little town of Pol-e-Khomri where I loved all its streets, alleys and kind people. I then sought to continue my higher education. I came to Kabul, where like many other students from across the country, I lived in Kabul University’s dormitory. From that time, all my focus was toward becoming the best student and score the highest grades. After a year I found that other students and friends were seeking ways to gain renown, or at least make themselves known. Not only a journalist, but everyone needs to choose a path that could help me be come an influential and useful member of society. And so, my career started with a TV media organization in Kabul. I was a journalist to provide information to the Afghan people. Additionally, people have grave concern that their government has not fulfilled its duties and promises to the Afghan people. Additionally, people have grave concerns about their delegates in the National Assembly, complaining that they are not representing their constituents; instead these delegates seek only personal gain from their positions. Thus, in such a situation, only the true Afghans, and you are the ones who are going to help reconstruct the country and regain our national pride. I want to say that we all must do our best to build a bright future for our country and our citizens. The youth have the greatest responsibility, and they must understand that the future of the country is in their hands. We have to confront the current challenges and find workable solutions. We have to understand that in this country we are all brothers who must unite believe in our beloved country. And thank you very much, dear Adela Khurrami.

About the interviewer: Adela Khurrami began teaching at Star in 2012 after studying English Literature and Accounting at Iqra College in Karachi, Pakistan and teaching English in Quetta.

We all must do our best to build bright future

An interview with Massoud Malik, TV journalist

everyone has to struggle and commit to learn more. Today, education in Afghanistan is a vital necessity and everyone must do his part in reconstructing this country; and this is possible only through education. Not only a journalist, but everyone needs to pursue learning, but higher education to understand the requirements of a journalist. We need educated and expert journalists. In this regard, studying is an important necessity for a journalist. A journalist must commit to study and read many different fields to become well versed in different areas. Besides, the journalist must maintain and develop good relations with all people with whom they come in contact. How have you remained successful and how do you stay abreast of the news and current events? Success comes always as a result of hard work and thoughtful decision making. Here, we are a good team where we are always in close contact with appropriate people and always up to date in current affairs. Here, the high ranking managers, producers, reporters, presenters and videographers are all trying to create superior presentations. Thus, contacts with people of influence and governmental institutions always help to provide an impactful report.

However, working in media is a difficult job in Afghanistan for several reasons, including such factors as the safety and security situation and the lack of access to information; still we continue to do our job. Additionally, government’s support is an important factor in allowing the media to continue its work; unfortunately, the media are often not provided this support. Lack of security is arguably the most critical problem for journalists. All employees of the media live with fear for their safety on a daily basis as they try to engage in their work in the most professional manner possible. With all these concerns, the media still feels responsible to convey the people’s message. We see and hear the people’s complaints about government, stating that their government has not fulfilled its duties and promises to the Afghan people. Additionally, people have grave concerns about their delegates in the National Assembly, complaining that they are not representing their constituents; instead these delegates seek only personal gain from their positions. Thus, in such a situation, only the true Afghans, and you are the ones who are going to help reconstruct the country and regain our national pride. I want to say that we all must do our best to build a bright future for our country and our citizens. The youth have the greatest responsibility, and they must understand that the future of the country is in their hands. We have to confront the current challenges and find workable solutions. We have to understand that in this country we are all brothers who must unite believe in our beloved country. And thank you very much, dear Adela Khurrami.